IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1.   (currently amended)   A requirements matching server for use in a requirements matching system comprising at least one requirements matching server accessible by means of a communications network, said requirements matching server comprising:

an input for receiving a user request message by means of said communications network, wherein a user request message comprises a specification of user requirements and an identifier for a response contact; and

routing means for forwarding a received specification of user requirements selectively via a further requirements matching server to a-one or more destinations determined by said routing means and accessible by means of said communications network, wherein said routing means comprise:

a store for storing at least one routing rule for controlling said routing means, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of requirements to be routed and an identifier for a-one or more corresponding destinations;

comparison means for comparing a specification of user requirements conveyed by a received user request message with a specification of requirements to be routed as defined in a stored routing rule and, in dependence upon the result

of said comparison, identifying a one or more corresponding destinations for the

forwarding of said specification of user requirements; and

forwarding means for transmitting, by means of said communications

network, a message conveying a specification of user requirements to a each

destination identified by said comparison means.

2. (previously presented) A requirements matching server according to claim 1, wherein said routing means further include registration means arranged, on receipt of a message conveying a routing rule, to store said routing rule in the store.

3. (previously presented) A requirements matching server according to claim 2, wherein said registration means are further arranged to generate a message including a message routing rule and to transmit the generated message to another requirements matching server.

4. (previously presented) A requirements matching server according to claim 1 including:

information extraction means for extracting a predetermined type of information from a received user request message, prior to forwarding by the routing means of a specification of user requirements contained therein, and for storing the extracted information; and

means responsive, on receipt of a message conveying a request to supply said

extracted information, to transmit to the sender of the extracted information request

message a message including said extracted information.

5.   (previously presented)   A requirements matching server according to

claim 4, wherein said predetermined type of information is the identifier for a response

contact of the specification of user requirements conveyed by a received user request

message.

6.   (previously presented)   A requirements matching server according to

claim 4, including billing means for raising a charge in respect of the sender of each

request to supply extracted information.

7.   (currently amended)   A requirements matching system comprising a

plurality of requirements matching servers, wherein each server includes an interface to a

communications network to enable communication with other servers of the system, and

wherein each server includes routing means for forwarding a specification of user

requirements conveyed by a received user request message selectively via a further

requirements matching server to a~one or more predetermined destinations selected by the

routing means according to the category of requirements described in said specification,

said category being one of a predefined set of categories.

8.   (currently amended)   A system according to claim 7, wherein each

server of the system is a server comprising:

an input for receiving a user request message by means of said communications

network, wherein a user request message comprises a specification of user requirements

and an identifier for a response; and

routing means for forwarding a received specification of user requirements

selectively via a further requirements matching server to a-one or more destinations

determined by said routing means and accessible by means of said communications

network, wherein said routing means comprise:

a store for storing at least one routing rule for controlling said routing

means, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of requirements to be

routed and an identifier for a-one or more corresponding destinations;

comparison means for comparing a specification of user requirements

conveyed by a received user request message with a specification of requirements

to be routed as defined in a stored routing rule and, in dependence upon the result

of said comparison, identifying a-one or more corresponding destinations for the

forwarding of said specification of user requirements; and

forwarding means for transmitting, by means of said communications

network, a message conveying a specification of user requirements to a-each

destination identified by said comparison means.

9.   (previously presented)   A system according to claim 7, including at

least one user access server arranged with access to at least one requirements matching

server of the system, said at least one user access server having a user interface for

receipt of a specification of user requirements and means for generating a user request

message comprising the received specification of user requirements and an identifier for a

response contact, and for forwarding the generated message to said at least one

requirements matching server.

10.   (previously presented)   A system according to claim 7, including at

least one server providing a user interface to enable a user to receive, from one or more

servers of said system of servers, user request messages conveying a specification of user

requirements relating to a predetermined category of requirements.

11.   (previously presented)   A system according to claim 7, wherein each

said requirements specification is defined according to a predetermined requirements

representation scheme.

12.   (currently amended)   A requirements matching system, having at

least one requirements matching server arranged with access to a communications

network, wherein said at least one requirements matching server includes:

an input for receiving a user request message by means of said communications network, wherein a user request message comprises a ~~specifiction~~ specification of user requirements and an identifier for a response contact; and

routing means for forwarding a received specification of user requirements selectively via a further requirements matching server to ~~a~~ one or more destinations determined by said routing means and accessible by means of said communications network, wherein said routing means comprise:

a store for storing at least one routing rule for controlling said routing means, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of requirements to be routed and an identifier for ~~a~~ one or more corresponding destinations;

comparison means for comparing a specification of user requirements conveyed by a received user request message with a specification of requirements to be routed as defined in a stored routing rule and, in dependence upon the result of said comparison, identifying ~~a~~ one or more corresponding destinations for the forwarding of said specification of user requirements; and

forwarding means for transmitting, by means of said communications network, a message conveying a specification of user requirements to ~~a~~ each destination identified by said comparison means.

13.   (canceled)

14.   (previously presented)   An electronic trading system~~, including at least one requirements matching server according to claim 1~~.comprising:

a requirements matching server for use in a requirements matching system comprising at least one requirements matching server accessible by means of a communications network, said requirements matching server comprising:

an input for receiving a user request message by means of said communications network, wherein a user request message comprises a specification of user requirements and an identifier for a response contact; and

routing means for forwarding a received specification of user requirements selectively via a further requirements matching server to a one or more destinations determined by said routing means and accessible by means of said communications network, wherein said routing means comprise:

a store for storing at least one routing rule for controlling said routing means, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of requirements to be routed and an identifier for one or more corresponding destinations;

comparison means for comparing a specification of user requirements conveyed by a received user request message with a specification of requirements to be routed as defined in a stored routing rule and, in dependence upon the result of said comparison, identifying one or

more corresponding destinations for the forwarding of said specification of

user requirements; and

forwarding means for transmitting, by means of said

communications network, a message conveying a specification of user

requirements to each destination identified by said comparison means.

15.   (canceled)

16.   (currently amended)   A method of routing a specification of user

requirements from a user to a potential supplier, the method comprising:

receiving a request message conveying said specification of user requirements;

comparing said specification of requirements conveyed by said received request

message with a specification of supplier deliverables defined in each rule of a set of at

least one routing rule, wherein a routing rule comprises a specification of supplier

deliverables and an identifier for a-one or more corresponding forwarding destinations;

in dependence upon the result of said comparison, identifying a-one or more

forwarding destinations corresponding to said specification of user requirements; and

transmitting a message including said specification of user requirements to said

each identified forwarding destination selectively via a further requirements matching

server.

17.   (previously presented)   A method according to claim 16, including

extracting one or more predetermined types of information from said received request

message and storing the extracted information.

18.   (previously presented)   A method as in claim 16, wherein each said

specification of user requirements and of supplier deliverables is defined according to the

same predetermined representation scheme.

19.   (canceled)

20.   (previously presented)   A requirements matching system according to

claim 7, wherein servers of the system are arranged to forward specifications of user

requirements describing a particular category of requirements, conveyed by received user

request messages to a predetermined respective server of the system.

21.   (currently amended)   An electronic trading system according to claim

~~15~~23, wherein servers of the system are arranged to forward specifications of user

requirements describing a particular category of requirements, conveyed by received user

request messages, to a predetermined respective server of the system.

11

22.   (currently amended)   An electronic purchasing apparatus for use with

a requirements matching system comprising a plurality of requirements matching servers,

wherein each server of the requirements matching system includes an interface to a

communications network to enable communication with other servers of the system, and

wherein each server includes routing means for forwarding a specification of user

requirements conveyed by a received user request message <u>selectively via a further</u>

<u>requirements matching server</u> to a <u>one or more</u> predetermined destination<u>s</u> selected by the

routing means according to the category of requirements described in said specification,

said category being one of a predefined set of categories, the apparatus comprising:

a communications network interface to enable communication with at least one

requirements matching server of said requirements matching system;

a user interface for receiving a specification of user requirements; and

a message generator for generating a user request message comprising a received

specification of user requirements and an identifier for a response contact, and for

transmitting the generated user request message to a server of said requirements matching

system.

23.   (currently amended)   An electronic trading system including a

plurality of requirements matching servers, wherein each server includes an interface to a

communications network to enable communication with other servers of the system, and

wherein each server includes routing means for forwarding a specification of user

requirements conveyed by a received user request message <u>selectively via a further</u>

<u>requirements matching server</u> to a̶ <u>one or more</u> predetermined destination<u>s</u> selected by the

routing means according to the category of requirements described in said specification,

said category being one of a predefined set of categories.